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## ARE THE FARMERS POPULISTS?

BY JOHN M. STAHL, SECRETARY OF THE FARMERS' NATIONAL  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES.

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HE who thinks that the farmers of this country are not in favor of sound finance and are more favorably disposed towards a depreciated currency than are the rest of our population, does them an injustice, and must have forgotten or misinterpreted a consistent chain of facts in our political history. Of the two principal political parties now in existence, it may be said broadly, but none the less accurately, that the Republican party has stood for safe and sound finance and the jealous upholding of the national credit, while the Democratic party has championed measures for a depreciated currency and the debasement of the national credit. Equally prominent is another fact: the strength of the Democratic party has been in the cities, while the farmers have been the strength and support of the Republican party. New York State is a striking illustration of this. The Democratic majorities have been in the cities; from the farms have come the votes that made majorities for the party that has stood for a sound currency and the strictly honest discharge of every financial obligation, private or public. Why, then, should the farmer, more than other classes, be accused of susceptibility to financial heresies, and of a disposition to debase our currency? His vote shows the very opposite.

The fiat-greenback heresy furnishes such a striking parallel to the present demand for the free coinage of silver that it will be instructive to recall the chief events of its course; and, in fact, this is necessary to any proper consideration of the farmer's attitude towards financial problems, and the campaign of 1872 is such a close parallel to that of 1896 that it may well have our careful study.

The sentiment in favor of a partial repudiation, at least, of the war debt was strong immediately after the close of the Civil War. Naturally enough, the element that had opposed the national government in its war measures, including those to provide the necessary financial means, was now ready to advocate the repudiation, in part or wholly, of the debt contracted to preserve the Union, and this element was strengthened by the currency-contraction policy of Mr. McCulloch, Secretary of the Treasury. At that time President Johnson was the head of all the elements opposed to the Republican party, and in his annual message to Congress in December, 1868, he declared that "the holders of our securities have already received upon their bonds a larger amount than their original investment, measured by the gold standard. Upon this statement of facts it would seem to be but just and equitable that the six per cent. interest now paid by the government should be applied to the reduction of the principal, in semi-annual instalments, which in sixteen years and eight months would liquidate the entire national debt." The opposition to the issue of greenbacks, when such an issue seemed necessary to the continuance of the war for the preservation of the Union, had been led by Mr. Geo. H. Pendleton, of Ohio ; and in 1868 Mr. Pendleton was again the leader of the Democratic party in its policy as to greenbacks, but he and that party now entertained such a radically different view of the greenback that they proposed to use it altogether in payment of the public debt. "The same currency for the bond-holder and the plow-holder," was the cry of the Democrats. It will be seen that they made the mistake of appealing particularly to the farmer for support in their assault on the national credit and honor. The rivalry between Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Chase led to the nomination of Mr. Seymour, but the Pendleton element wrote the platform adopted by the convention that met in New York city, July 4, 1868. The boldest, most positive declaration in that platform was that "all the obligations of the government, not payable by their express terms in coin, ought to be paid in lawful money." The Republicans took direct issue with this position. General Hawley, the permanent chairman of the Republican National Convention, in his speech on taking the chair, used the most emphatic language in declaring that the national honor must be kept unstained. "For every dollar of national debt the blood

of a soldier is pledged. Every bond, in letter and in spirit, must be as sacred as a soldier's grave!" he exclaimed, and the Convention broke into prolonged applause. The platform was not less forcible, and was more specific in declaring that every obligation of the government must be discharged honestly and in good faith. "The best money for the bond-holder and for the plow-holder," said the Republicans. Governor Seymour made a tour as far west as Illinois, closing only with the national canvass. He made many addresses. He was a most skilful and captivating orator. The chief topics of his speeches were the cost of government and the burden of taxation. How did the farmers respond to his seductive appeals, that on the one hand magnified debts and taxes and on the other hand offered easy means of paying debts and a smaller tax burden? *Every agricultural State gave a majority for the Republican ticket.* And the Democratic vote was strongest in the cities, the Republican vote in the country. New York city gave Seymour 60,000 majority; the rest of the State gave Grant 50,000 majority. In Philadelphia, the Democrats had a small majority at the October election, but the rest of the State gave a Republican majority of 10,000, which was considerably increased in November. The election was uncomfortably close. Only the large farmer vote decided the issue against repudiation and for honest finance and national honor.

In his inaugural address of March 4, 1869, President Grant took strong ground in favor of upholding the national credit. "Let it be understood," he said, "that no repudiator of one farthing of our public debt will be trusted in public place, and it will go far to strengthen our public credit, which ought to be the best in the world." The first act to receive his signature (March 18, 1869) was the act "to strengthen the public credit," which pledged the government to "the payment in coin, or its equivalent, of all obligations, notes, and bonds, except those wherein the law authorizing the issue stipulated that payment might be made in lawful money, which simply meant legal-tender notes." It did not receive a Democratic vote in either the House or the Senate. The arguments of the Democrats now are remarkably like those employed by Mr. Thurman, Mr. Bayard, and Mr. Garrett Davis, in opposition to the act, before the Senate in March, 1869. The refunding acts of July 14, 1870, and of August 20, 1871, provided for the refunding of the public

debt in bonds, all of which were made payable in coin. The payment in coin was persistently resisted by the Democrats, but the acts became laws by the votes of Republicans in the House and the Senate and the signature of a Republican President.

Thus the issue continued to be clearly defined and events were taking shape for the campaign of the next year. The conditions then existing were remarkably like those now prevailing. The Republican party, the friend of the greenback to such an extent as the necessities of the war made its use justifiable, refused to put it to a use that would have violated good faith and tarnished the national credit. The Republican party, that has shown its friendship for silver by coining more of it than have all other political parties combined in the history of this government, now refuses to coin it under conditions and to an extent that would violate good faith and tarnish the public credit. Two years before, in 1870, there had originated and in the intervening time there had developed an intense personal hostility to President Grant among certain members of his own party; two years ago such hostility to President Cleveland originated and has since increased. President Grant was accused of grasping powers that did not belong to the Executive; of responsibility for an alleged dangerous centralization of power in the national government; of unwarranted participation in the affairs of State governments; of being arbitrary; of allowing personal likes and dislikes to have too much influence in appointment to office; of using political patronage to influence legislation, and of growing rich more rapidly than is becoming to the Chief Executive. The hostility to President Cleveland within his own party originated in the same charges. In 1872, as in 1896, there were Republican "bolters," who put protection, the cardinal principle of the Republican party, in a secondary place—the "Liberal" Republicans declaring in their National Convention at Cincinnati that the tariff question should be remitted to the people in their Congressional districts; and the Republican bolters in 1896 have acted on the ground that protection is unimportant compared with silver coinage. It will be noted, also, that in 1870-2 as in 1894-6 the President and the element in his own party opposed to him were at odds on tariff legislation. The real originators of the "Liberal" Republican movement were all free traders, and President Grant was as much opposed to their tariff views as

President Cleveland was to the Wilson bill. The "Liberal" Republican Convention denounced repudiation and demanded the speedy return to specie payments, thus taking grounds on the money question directly opposed to that occupied by the Democratic party up to that time; and at its National Convention that year the Democratic party adopted the platform of the Republican bolters. In 1896 the Republican bolters take grounds on the money question opposed to that previously occupied by the Democracy, and the Democratic National Convention again adopts the financial platform of the Republican bolters. In 1872, there were defections from the Democratic ranks as there are in 1896, claiming that the mass of the party, and not they, had ceased to be Democrats. In 1872 Grant was nominated with great enthusiasm on the first ballot; and, for the first time since, the Republican National Convention this year nominated a candidate for the Presidency on the first ballot, and with great enthusiasm. There was an even more marked likeness in the condition of the public mind. Times were hard and the people were filled with unrest. In his "Twenty Years of Congress," Mr. Blaine says:

"When the Forty-second Congress met in December, 1871, specie was going to Europe at the rate of \$66,000,000 per annum, and the balance of trade for that fiscal year was running against the United States to the amount of \$188,000,000. It was a period of financial theories. The prejudice against national banks seemed to increase, and the *fiat* of a government so rich and powerful as that of the United States would, it was maintained, suffice to make all the notes it might put out available as money, and the volume ought to be abundant enough to stimulate every nerve of production and trade."

How has all this reappeared in 1896, even to the overestimate of the power of the fiat of this government to make value! Then the export of gold, the adverse balance of trade, and the distrust of the national credit were the direct results, and the hard times, the popular unrest, and the large brood of financial heresies the indirect, but certain, results of an unwise readjustment of the tariff, leading to insufficient national revenue; and the same cause is responsible for the same results to-day. Business men clearly saw then that it would be impossible for the national government to make good its promises to pay, to uphold the national credit, if such conditions continued, and the result was a distrust culminating in panic and deep financial depression.

For some years previous to 1872, there had been a clamor for reduction in duties. It was declared that the receipts of the government were too large. How familiar has all this been made to us since ! Congress responded to the popular demand. The act of July 4, 1870, reduced the revenues of the national government \$70,000,000 a year. The acts of March 5, May 1 and June 6, 1872, made a further reduction of \$65,000,000 per year in the national revenues. The result was inevitable. Like conditions have like effect on the credit of individuals and of nations. If a man or a nation would retain financial honor and be prosperous, one as well as the other must have enough money to meet the just demands of creditors.

As the campaign of 1872 progressed, the Republicans stood more and more for increased revenue and a jealous regard and substantial measures for the national credit. The Republicans had passed the credit-strengthening act and the refunding acts, against the solid opposition of the Democracy, and stood by those acts. The Democracy, adopting the anti-repudiation platform of the "Liberal" Republicans, not because it expressed their convictions, but in an ignoble hope of winning an election and gaining office, drifted more and more to their old position, and before the close of the campaign stood for the fiat greenback heresy. Again the same issue, and the same conditions and divisions confront us this year. How did the farmers vote in 1872 ? Read, and know how they will vote in 1896. As in 1868, *every agricultural state gave the Republican national ticket a large majority*. Mr. Greeley had been very popular with the farmers. He had been an oracle to many of them. Perhaps no other man in our history has enjoyed such a closely personal popularity among the farmers of this country. But this popularity availed him naught, when a vote for him meant a vote for national discredit. The farmers turned from their old and once trusted friend and voted to pay the national debt in coin and not in fiat-greenbacks.\*

\* In 1872 the vote was: New York State—Greeley, 387,282; Grant, 440,738. New York County—Greeley, 77,814; Grant, 54,667. Kings County—Greeley, 38,108; Grant, 33,969. Ohio gave 37,531 majority for Grant, but Hamilton County, containing Cincinnati, gave a majority for Greeley, notwithstanding its large German population and Greeley's views on sumptuary legislation. Kansas, very nearly a purely agricultural State, gave more than two votes for Grant to one for Greeley. Michigan, another purely agricultural State, did very nearly as well. Illinois gave nearly four votes for Grant to three for Greeley, and Cook County, it must be said, did even better than the State; but Peoria, Adams, and Sangamon Counties, containing the three largest cities in the State after Chicago, gave majorities for Greeley. Minnesota gave more than three votes for Grant to two for Greeley, but Ramsey County, containing its largest city, gave a majority for Greeley. Iowa gave very nearly two votes for Grant to one for Greeley, but Lee, Dubuque, and

Mr. Blaine was one of the most accurate political observers and analysts this country has produced. He was well aware that it was not the country, but the city, that made the stronger demand for dishonest finance. To quote again from his monumental work:

"The Forty-third Congress met in a period of discouragement and disaster. . . . The situation gave fresh arguments to the champions of the *flat* dollar. . . . A large proportion of the business men, especially in the West and Southwest, believed that an increased circulation of notes would bring great relief."

Note that it was not from the farmers, but from the business men, that, according to the Speaker of the Forty-third Congress, came the clamor that led that Congress to raise the limit of United States notes to \$400,000,000. President Grant vetoed the act. The act for the resumption of specie payments was passed by the Senate December 21, 1874, and by the House January 7, 1875, the Democrats in both branches of Congress voting solidly against it. It was promptly signed by the President, who accompanied his approval of the act with a special message, in which he recommended *an increase of the revenues*. Congress heeded this recommendation and passed the bill approved March 31, 1875, "to protect the sinking fund and provide for the exigencies of the government." Thus the seat of the disease was reached. The last fierce fight for the "rag baby" was made in Ohio in the fall of the same year, and not even his great personal popularity among the farmers availed "Bill" Allen—the original "Populist"—and he was defeated. The next year the fiat-greenback heresy had so few supporters that when the Greenback national party nominated the justly popular Peter Cooper for President he could poll only 80,000 votes in all the country. This was the fiat-greenback strength until, not the farmer, but the city labor unions favored it, and developed the Labor Greenback party which, in 1878, polled a million votes. Not on the farms, but in the cities, were the fiat-greenbackers!

The fiat-greenback idea of the seventies, reproduced in the nineties as the fiat-silver idea, and both founded on the assump-

Scott Counties, containing three large cities of the State, gave majorities for Greeley, while such purely agricultural counties as Osceola gave 302 votes for Grant to 9 for Greeley, and Lyon gave 87 votes for Grant to 1 for Greeley. Nebraska, a purely agricultural State, gave 70 per cent. of its vote for Grant. Wisconsin gave Grant a handsome majority, although all its counties casting more than 3,000 votes, with one exception, gave majorities for Greeley. The vote of 1883 exhibits exactly the same proof that the farmers made the Republican majorities.



tion that this government is strong enough to nullify monetary law, and in opposition to all other nations—this idea, Mr. Blaine pointed out, gained greatest acceptance among business men of the West and Southwest. Because the unsound money sentiment has been strongest in these agricultural sections, it has been generally supposed to belong to farmers more than to other classes. Such a supposition, natural to those content to accept surface indications, would not be entertained by such a man as Mr. Blaine. As the people of the West and Southwest have been and are borrowers rather than lenders, compared with the people of the East, it is but natural that propositions to pay debts easily should find more favor in the West and Southwest than in the East; but, as Mr. Blaine observed, and as their votes eloquently testify, farmers are less disposed than are other classes to support the financial heresies that hard times always incubate. The same superficial, mistaken observers that conclude that farmers are in favor of sound money, because unsound money theories find most favor in the West and Southwest, also hold, and as incorrectly, the farmer responsible for Populism. Yet, in the greatest agricultural states of the Union, Populism has scarcely been tolerated by the farmers, and the Populist party has made a respectable showing only in the towns and cities. Iowa now disputes with Illinois the honor of being the greatest agricultural State in the Union. What figure has the Populist party cut in Iowa? In Illinois the Populist vote has been nearly altogether in the towns and cities, Chicago alone furnishing more than one half the Populist vote of the entire State. In the other great agricultural States, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, etc., Populism has cut no figure.\*

\*In Illinois the first Populist ticket was voted on in 1894. The Populist vote of the entire State was 59,793; of Cook County, 33,966—more than one-half. Citizens of Chicago, and other cities and towns, and not "the long-whiskered farmer," were the Populists. In 1892 the People's party ticket received only 2.51 per cent. of the vote in Illinois. In Indiana it received only 4 per cent. of the vote; in Iowa, an agricultural State, only 1.65 per cent. of the vote, although Weaver of that State headed the ticket for President. And the vote shows that very few of these votes were cast by farmers. A Populist ticket appeared in Michigan first in 1894. It received 7.57 per cent. of the vote. In 1895 the Populist ticket received 7.2 per cent. of the vote. In Missouri the Populist ticket received 6.88 per cent. of the vote in 1894, and 8.45 per cent. of the vote in 1895. A Populist ticket was voted first in Wisconsin in 1891. It received 6.81 per cent. of the vote. A Populist ticket was voted first in Ohio in 1895. It received 6.23 per cent. of the vote. Even if farmers cast all the Populist ballots in these agricultural States, it would be far from the truth to call farmers Populists; but an analysis of the vote shows that farmers, even in these agricultural States, cast less than one half of it. The farmers of no other State have been maligned as have those of Kansas. They have been unmercifully ridiculed and abused for being Populists. Yet not they, but the townspeople of Kansas, are the Populists. Take the flood-tide Populist vote of 1892, when the State gave a majority for

Why, then, attribute it to the farmer? To do so, stamps one as either pitifully incompetent and shallow in his observations and judgments, or wilfully dishonest. Instead of being what they are so often pictured to be, the farmers are the most sensible, substantial, and patriotic element of our population, and have never failed to uphold by their votes or their lives the honor and glory of the nation. Instead of receiving recognition and praise from those whose enterprises they have saved from disaster, their action has been persistently falsified and they have been paid only with vilifications and taunts and ridicule of their occupation and their personal appearance from those whose interests they have defended. Maligned and abused and ridiculed, they have kept the faith! In all the history of our country, no other class has shown by its votes such a sublime devotion to principle as have the Republican farmers!

To hold farmers responsible for Populism is not a greater mistake than to suppose that farmers are influenced in their currency views by hostility to city people and their interests. Tens of thousands of farmers' daughters are in the cities, not only as wives of successful men, but the flower of the stenographers, clerks, and teachers there, and the love and pride of the old folks at home. Nearly all of them have deposits in savings banks. I have the honor to know four farmers' daughters, skilled stenographers, diligent workers, honest and virtuous girls, that by using one large room for parlor and bedroom, by preparing their own meals in addition to the hard work of the office, and practising other economies, have each been able to save several hundred dollars, deposited in a Chicago savings bank. Their fathers and brothers would guard those hard made savings almost as they

Weaver—for which the farmers were most loudly cursed. The largest percentage of votes in opposition to the Populists was in the extreme western counties, purely agricultural, without cities—the counties in which nine-tenths of city people think a practically solid vote for the Populist ticket was cast. Here are the votes of these counties: Garfield, Republican, 102; Populist, 69; Finney, Republican, 478; Populist, 338; Greeley, Republican, 241; Populist, 114; Hamilton, Republican, 253; Populist, 186; Haskell, Republican, 177; Populist, 111; Hodgman, Republican, 363; Populist, 223; Kearney, Republican, 219; Populist, 141; Morton, Republican, 106; Populist, 26; and so on, while such counties as Leavenworth, Sedgwick and Sumner, having cities and towns, gave majorities for the Populist ticket. These western counties did even better in 1894, the Republican vote is given first: Finney, 492, —254; Gray, 173—98; Greeley, 175—81; Hamilton, 187—93; Hodgman, 287—152; Kearney, 199—27; Morton, 67—37; and so on. These farmers, on their lonely farms, poor in all but a sublime courage to vote their convictions, had not many votes to give, but as they gave them two to one against the Populists, who will say that they are not like the widow's mite and are greater than the thousands of the counties having towns and cities which heaped up the Populist vote? Since they cast their votes righteously, shall it not be counted unto them for righteousness? Yet for their work at the polls they have received only misrepresentation and ridicule.

would guard the good name of those girls. There are tens of thousands of other such girls having savings bank deposits. Can any one that knows the farmer think for a moment that he would favor legislation that would take away nearly one-half the value of those deposits—legislation that would be indeed “a crime”? Farmers’ sons are the large majority of the successful business men—manufacturers, merchants, bankers—of the cities; who that knows them can believe that the fathers and brothers on the farm will vote hurt to the boys in the city of whom they are so proud.

Farmers understand the interdependence of industries. They know that any policy, whether it relates to the tariff or the currency, that reduces the output of factories and the business of merchants, must lessen the purchasing capacity for farm products; that any measure that banks furnace fires and lowers the wages of workingmen must lower the prices of beef and wheat and wool. As a shrewd business-man as well as patriot, the farmer would have every spindle hum, a merry fire at every forge, and every workman’s pail well filled. He agrees with the silver monometallist that our great need is more money in circulation, but he believes that to get more money in circulation we must have, not more activity at our mints so much as increased production of our factories under a protective tariff and more confidence in our financial integrity. There is as much money in circulation in the country to-day as there was in the years immediately preceding 1893—years of unexampled prosperity—save the gold called across the sea by the fear of foreigners that we will reach a silver basis and the gold hoarded at home because of the same fear in this country. The money still exists, but it is not circulating as the life blood of trade because unwise tariff legislation has stricken down American industry and created distrust, and because those that have much of our money fear that if they pay it out for stocks or bonds, or loan it to manufacturers or merchants or investors, they may have to receive in payment scarcely more than one-half of its value. What we need to get more money into circulation is not so much more money coined as a greater demand for money to pay wages and the restoration of confidence in the money that we have.

JOHN M. STAHL.